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Cross-border Collaboration in Ireland

The Institute of Healthcare Management (IHM) is the leading membership organisation for health and social care managers and leaders in Northern Ireland. In recent years, IHM Northern Ireland and the Health Management Institute of Ireland (HMI) have collaborated in a number of cross-border initiatives, including shared learning for members.

Louise McMahon, current Chair of IHM previously worked in the Republic of Ireland and remains a member of HMI. She continues to have strong links with her former colleagues in HMI and attended the HMI's successful conference in Dublin in October 2012 with colleagues. As a result, important connections have been established. For example, one of Ireland's foremost clinical leaders, Professor John Higgins, has been invited to present in the series of Leadership Masterclasses in Northern Ireland.

In November 2012, the HMI President, Richard Dooley, travelled to Belfast for the IHM Northern Ireland's Annual Conference. The conference was attended by more than 120 people. IHM Northern Ireland was pleased to offer the Minister for Health in Northern Ireland, Mr. Edwin Poots M.L.A. and Dr. Rafael Bengoa, the then Minister of Health for the Basque Country, the opportunity to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two regional governments at the conference. This provides the opportunity for healthcare managers and clinicians from the two jurisdictions to co-operate and learn from each other's experiences.

The conference was also attended by the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Health and the Chief Medical Officer and saw the presentation of a number of awards. These included awards for developing and experienced managers, quality and, for the first time, the inaugural Medical Manager Award, with generous sponsorship from a spectrum of companies interested in engaging with senior health service leaders.

The focus of the conference was the relentless pace of change for managers and leaders in health and social care in Northern Ireland. Delegates were particularly interested in hearing from Dr. Ambrose McLoughlin, Secretary General of the Department of Health of Ireland who described the challenging change agenda for health services managers in Ireland. Across the border between the north and south of Ireland, managers and leaders are sharing experience, knowledge and expertise – particularly in performance management, commissioning and the development of hospital networks.

A central element of current policy in Northern Ireland, 'Transforming Your Care', sees the development of Integrated Care Partnerships between the primary and secondary care sectors and includes the voluntary and community sectors to ensure appropriate management of long-term conditions outside hospital. An initially small research project in this area is in development with Professor Bernadette Hannigan, Chief Scientific Advisor to the Department and Professor Mike Clarke of Queens University, Director of the Medical Research Council All Ireland Hub for Trials Methodology Research.

There is a long history of collaboration between health and social care professionals on the island of Ireland. Communities living close to the border in both jurisdictions have benefited from the sharing of services, including out of hours GP services and cross-border renal dialysis. This allows services to be provided to relatively smaller population groups, avoiding the need to travel long distances to larger centres of population.

Furthermore, co-operation with the Dublin maternity hospitals is part of the contingency planning for neonatology services in Northern Ireland, including in-utero transfers where necessary. Another recent significant development in cross-border collaboration is the commitment of the Irish government to buy radiotherapy capacity at Altnagelvin Hospital in Derry for people living in Donegal in the north western part of the island.

Northern Ireland is having a particularly exciting year in 2013 and the whole island will be working together to host and promote these events.

- The G8 summit of world leaders will take place in County Fermanagh in June at the Lough Erne resort on a 600 acre (240 hectare) peninsula with a Nick Faldo designed golf course, where the world's best golfer Rory McIlroy has played.
- The World Police and Fire Games - the third largest international multi-sport event in the world - will see 25,000 visitors including 10,000 competitors from 70 countries come to Northern Ireland in August.
- Derry City will host the cream of U.K. and international acts in the year long City of Culture Festival – including the Turner Prize, London Symphony Orchestra, Royal National Ballet and the Hofesh Schechter Company.
- Derry will also be the venue for the all-Ireland Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, which is the biggest competition and celebration of Irish music anywhere in the world and is coming to Northern Ireland for the first time ever.

Behind the scenes for all these events, health and social care services have been engaged in careful contingency planning, with strong leadership from the emergency services.

This all goes to show how the Northern Ireland Institute of Healthcare Management and the Health Management Institute of Ireland, as well as managers and leaders north and south of the border, engage on a daily basis to seek solutions to problems and to implement innovations to improve services. We hope that this will continue and grow in the future.

Author:

Louise McMahon
Chair of Institute of Healthcare Management

